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MYSTICISM AND IDEALISM

J. LOEWENBERG

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MYSTICISM AND IDEALISM*

J. LOEWENBERG

It requires not a little temerity to approach the subject of mysticism. The topic is so complex, so vast, so elusive. It is well-nigh impossible to say anything with which friend or foe of mysticism would not heartily disagree. Whatever opinion one may hold of it, one is sure to be told that one has misunderstood it. If he confesses to being alien to the mystic temperament, his right to speak of it is justly challenged, and if he is personally intimate with the mystic experience its ineffable character lends itself to no intelligible discourse. Whether inside or outside the charmed circle, speech seems equally ineffectual. With regard to death we are in the same predicament. While we are still living, our indirect opinions of it can lay claim to little validity, and once we are dead we do not talk. But just as we cannot, as intelligent beings, renounce the right to endeavor, however unsuccessfully, to penetrate the mystery of death, to interpret its meaning, to grasp its significance, so in the case of mysticism it is impossible for us to refrain from the attempt to understand, albeit imperfectly, a spiritual phenomenon which has deepened and enriched the inner life of the race and without which its religions and its arts would have remained lamentably impoverished.

* An address before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, December 10, 1915.

The analogy between mysticism and death, however, is not altogether perfect, for the mystics, unlike the dead, speak and act, although their words and practices have, to the uninitiated, little meaning, little relevancy. The uninitiated find the mystic utterances so unfathomable that for an appreciation of them they, for the most part, depend upon the numerous interpretations of mysticism undertaken from so many angles, such as the psychological, pathological, religious, aesthetic, philosophical. The result is that most information concerning mysticism is, at the best, third hand. Is it a wonder, then, that "doctors disagree" and that the prevalent opinions about what constitutes mysticism are so numerous, conflicting, and often far from enlightening?

It is fortunate that, in our interpretation of mysticism, we are able, in a large measure, to follow the guidance of Professor Hocking's profound book, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*. In sincerity, sympathy, and sanity of judgment, few accounts of mysticism can compare with his. Although Part V of Mr. Hocking's work forms the general background of this paper, I have essayed no exposition of our author's views. To expound him with any degree of adequacy is a task from which many men more enterprising than myself might well shrink. The book is so unique in style and composition that it admits of no summary restatement. Any attempt at a *precise* restatement of Mr. Hocking's views would be sure to fail because of his method. He unites so intimately lyrical and reflective qualities that the reader is often at a loss to tell what the author sets forth as personal conviction due to solitary meditation and what as argument claiming objective validity. But the reader without attending to precision or exactness soon yields to the spell of Mr. Hocking's seductive style and ere long finds himself sharing the author's mood. And if a work of art may be judged by the genuine mood it creates and sustains, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, besides being eminently profound,

has also the merits of an artistic creation. As one reads it the appreciation of being admitted to the author's intimate meditations makes one so sensitive that to disturb their continuity and lyrical charm by interposing questions and doubts would seem nothing short of rude pedantry. Please do not ask me therefore to give you a literal review or synopsis of his discussion of mysticism. I must presuppose a knowledge of the text and, using it as background, deal with the whole topic in my own way. Measuring mysticism by a frankly rationalistic standard, you must, of course, not be surprised to find my attitude towards it rather critical. I am second to none in profound appreciation of the supreme value of the mystic *mood* for religion and art and life generally, but here I must assess its strictly philosophic worth and significance, and its strictly philosophic worth and significance we shall find to lie in its decidedly non-mystical character. So without further apologies, but with fear and trembling, let me address myself to my task.

It is a pity that the word "mysticism" should have become a name to cover such a variety of things. As Evelyn Underhill, perhaps the most modern interpreter of mysticism, says, "a word which is impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to 'menticulture' and sorcery, dreamy poetry and medieval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism and the tepid speculations of the Cambridge Platonists . . . soon ceases to have a useful meaning."¹ Recent writers have endeavored to purge mysticism from all these accidental associations and to fix its essential meaning by declaring it to be a way of intense or enhanced living. So Miss Underhill characterizes it as "an organic life process, a something which the whole self does . . . a definite state or form of an enhanced life."² Delacroix interprets it in the same way. Mysticism for him is "a new

¹ *Mysticism*, London, 1910, p. 86.

² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

level of life power," "an organizing power," "a higher variation of life." Similarly, Rufus M. Jones, who speaks of the mystical experience as "a unifying, fusing, intensifying inward event."³ Hocking, too, emphasizes the life of the mystic rather than his teaching. "Mysticism," he says, "we shall define, not by its doctrine but by its deed. . . . It is a way of dealing with God . . . affecting first the mystic's being and then his thinking."⁴

Mysticism, as Professor Hocking further interprets it, is not only a life-enhancing and life-heightening power, but is a universally human attitude shared by some individuals at rare intervals and by other individuals more frequently. The most essential elements of the mystic's attitude Hocking finds in common worship. Indeed, "mysticism and common worship," so he asserts, "do stand or fall together."⁵ The mystic impulse should thus not be looked upon as a matter of special temperament. "There are mystics in all temperaments," Hocking continues, "the spiritual ambition of the mystic is the prerogative of no one particular type of human nature."⁶ Wherever one finds worship, there one finds mysticism. The difference between the common worshiper and the traditional mystic would then seem to be one of degree: the latter's life work consists in what to the former is but a passing mood. The insatiable hunger for the immediate contemplation of absolute reality makes of the individual who has such hunger a perpetual worshiper. The longing for coming face to face with the eternal and innermost being of things, sporadic and diffused in all human beings, is permanent and specialized in the mystic. Those, then, in whom the will to worship is the dominant and ruling passion—"the specialists in

³ "Mysticism in Present-Day Religion," *Harvard Theological Review* for April, 1915. The above citations from Delacroix are taken from this article.

⁴ *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, New Haven, London and Oxford, 1912, p. 355.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

worship"—are, according to Hocking, the mystics by birth, the mystics of genius, the mystics by profession.

What is more precisely the art of worship? Hocking describes it as "a spontaneous impulse for spiritual self-preservation . . . for the ultimate judgment of life and for the renewal of the worth of life."⁷ The one who is engaged in the act of worship—intermittently or permanently—fixes his attention upon the higher and spiritual values of life, seeks these values in a realm other than the ordinary world he lives in, and derives from this higher level the meaning and the worth of his very existence. Through his act of worship, the worshiper endeavors to establish a spiritual relation with a higher level of life, and this relation, evanescent in its effect in the rare worshiper, is sustained in the typical mystic. But this relation—the final aim of worship—whether evanescent or sustained, has always been assumed to be of a peculiar nature. It is not an intellectual relation. It is rather an experience 'touched with emotion,' a personal passion, an immediate communion, which, like all immediate and emotional experiences, cannot be described in general terms to those who have not had such experiences. This experience is by all mystics of all ages declared to be essentially ineffable, and altogether too much has been made of the ineffable character of the mystic experience, which, perhaps, more than anything else, has contributed to envelop it in a shroud of mystery. The mystic experience is not mysterious because ineffable. It shares ineffableness with all affective and sensational experience. A toothache and the sensation of a color are not mysterious, yet they are as ineffable as the 'mystic union' with God. He who has never felt a toothache, he who is color-blind, and he who has never shared the mystic impulse—to him all these experiences are equally incommunicable.

The approach to God exemplified in every act of worship is, then, the peculiar mystic approach. In its uniqueness

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

and immediacy and ineffableness, this approach, when its consummation—the union with the Absolute—is reached, partakes of the nature of passion, but is strangely at variance with the way of reflection. Reflection is communicable, discursive, articulate, and mysticism has, therefore, always displayed a marked hostility towards reflective thought. The well-known mystical saying, “Believe not those prattlers who boast that they know God. Who knows him—is silent,”⁸ pithily expresses the anti-intellectualism of the mystic. Miss Underhill emphasizes the contrast between the mystic and the philosopher thus: “Where the philosopher guesses and argues, the mystic lives and looks; and speaks consequently the disconcerting language of first-hand experience, not the neat dialectic of the schools. Hence, whilst the Absolute of the metaphysicians remains a diagram—impersonal and unattainable—the Absolute of the mystic is lovable, attainable, alive.”⁹ Upon closer scrutiny the contrast between reflection and worship discloses itself to be the ancient and the modern conflict between mediacy and immediacy, between theory and practice, between abstract and concrete experience, between discursive and intuitive knowledge, between argument and vision, between thought and deed, between reasoning and living. Directly and concretely and practically—through the worshipful deed and through the worshipful life—the mystic claims that he ultimately rises to a higher level of existence and there attains the vision and the certainty of an Absolute Reality. The thinker, on the other hand, seems to the mystic to offer nothing but sterile principles, useless abstractions, and lifeless theories. “We come to you not as thinkers, but as doers”—so Evelyn Underhill interprets the message of the mystics.

In the preference for “doing” to “thinking,” and in the sundering of practice from theory, the mystic reveals

⁸ Quoted from J. Royce, *The World and the Individual*, New York, 1912, vol. I, p. 148.

⁹ *Mysticism*, p. 28.

himself, curiously enough, as the ally of common sense, strange and weird though the mystic's particular doings and practices may appear to it. To pronounce contempt for abstractions and to stigmatize theory as useless belongs to the very prerogative of a so-called 'practical' and common-sense point of view.¹⁰ Mysticism and common sense, intent upon the practically significant deeds to which life should be devoted, are at one in rejecting philosophic speculation as abstract, barren and useless. Why speculate? To speculate upon life seems a waste of the time that should be spent in *living*; to think upon the world threatens to imperil one's chances for *doing* something in it. Only mysticism is more definite in its pronouncements regarding the kind of practical life which has supreme value. Common sense, on the other hand, beyond a vague counsel to be practical, is reticent about both the meaning of the practical life and how best to live it.

What both common sense and mysticism fail to appreciate, however, is the theoretical implications of their practical attitudes. The question "What is practical?" is itself a theoretical question. To walk on one's head, for instance, is far from being a practical activity, yet its non-practicality can only be exhibited by means of a well defined theory of life with which walking on one's head is incompatible. Behind all practical admonitions lies concealed a theory. The reason *why* one should live in conformity either with the Golden Rule or with the Categorical Imperative or with the dictates of common sense or with the promptings of one's mystic impulse is because the *best* or the *right* kind of life is thus attained. But what the best or the right kind of life is is a matter of controversy and can be decided on theoretical grounds only. In vain, then,

¹⁰ The practical man's negative attitude towards theory often expresses itself in an amusing fashion. Thus, President Wilson's nomination was for a long time opposed by many politicians who seriously questioned the practical efficacy of a mere 'theorist,' a mere 'professor,' and "Professor Wilson" became a derogatory epithet which many newspapers then adopted.

does one attempt to evade theory. The practical derives its very practical significance from being consonant with a certain implied theory. Indeed, by practical can be meant nothing else than what furthers a certain end or fulfills a certain purpose regarded as valuable. But the value of the end in question must be justified. No end has axiomatic value—not even life itself. And the justification of any value will be found to involve a complete theory of life and of the world. Of mysticism this is particularly true. In extolling a practical and exalted life of worship as supremely valuable, mysticism is moved by motives which are theoretical as they are passionate. The value of worship is for the mystic not merely subjective. To be sure, worship and its concomitant results bring the individual serenity and an inward peace that passeth understanding, but the meaning and value of this subjective state is derived, not from the experience itself which the mystic obtains in worship, but from the object which is discovered and appropriated at the final stage of the mystic's worshipful quest. The supreme value and validity of the mystic experience is, after all, cognitive. Worship surpasses all else in value, because it finally institutes an immediate acquaintance with the deepest reality, with the Absolute, with God. Did not the mystic experience terminate in such cognition, worship would be devoid of all worth and significance. But to confer upon worship a supreme worth and validity because by its means reality is discoverable is to hold a certain view or theory of reality. Reality must be of such a nature as to conform to the mystic insight, and, which is more important, to the mystic insight alone. It is because reality is of a certain spiritual structure that to its discovery there leads but one path, namely, the mystic one. Were reality of a different texture—a fabric of atoms and molecules, for example—the mystic vision might possess the value of an emotional experience, but could scarcely claim objective validity. It is this claim to objective validity which commits the mystic to a theory of the universe, in the light of which the mystic life and its

strange practices become full of philosophic meaning and import.

The mystic's negative attitude toward other forms of cognition arises from his special theory of the Real. In all ages mystics have been emphatic in denouncing other than mystical means of communicating with God. Worship is by them looked upon, not as one of many legitimate methods of approaching the Absolute, but as *the* method. But reality, to be inaccessible to sense and reflection alike, must be of a certain determinate and definite character. Because reality is known or postulated to be alien to the stuff of which sense and reflection are made, sensible and reflective knowledge are stigmatized as invalid. To reject these forms of cognition, mysticism must know beforehand the sort of reality for the reach of which they prove ineffectual. To quote Hocking, "This and that, he [the mystic] says, are not God: It is not these that I seek."¹¹ The mystic must then *know* what he seeks in order to identify the object of his search when he has found it. It is impossible to begin the quest without in some measure defining both the object of the quest and the direction the search should take. And about both the mystics have never been in any doubt. The object of the mystic's search is perfectly definite: It is That Which Is, Pure Being, or Ultimate Reality. Ultimate Reality, however, is at once identified with the Absolute, or God; and the Absolute or God is further identified with the One and Whole, Immutable and Perfect. And because sense and reflection furnish but discrete fragments, and bits of experience and never the One and the Whole, they must quite consistently be discarded as guides to the Ultimate. What they give is nothing but appearances. Ultimate Reality must thus be looked for in an experience radically different from and other than sense and reflection. This necessitates an elaborate purging from sense and reflection, and when this is accomplished the One and the Whole

¹¹ *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 365.

stands revealed to an immediate, unique, and ineffable experience.

It will already be noted that the mystic's fundamental assumption—that ultimate reality is One and Whole and that this One and Whole must be of a spiritual character in order to be discoverable by a spiritual experience—forms the very tenets of Absolute Idealism. Only in philosophic idealism they are not assumptions, but the result of an elaborate and systematic process of reflective thought. Mysticism must begin by assuming the general idealistic thesis if the mystic quest have any meaning at all. For the mystic's adventure is no leap into the Unknown, he ventures upon no strange and unmapped seas; far too certain is he even of his landing place—*a reality which is One and Whole and spiritual revealable to a spiritual experience*. To be sure, his successful arrival—his later union with the Absolute—gives 'pragmatic' sanction to his quest—his idea 'worked'—but it is impossible to grant the mystic a legitimate right to assume the essentially idealistic nature of reality ere his mystic experience has disclosed it to him—this experience being the only certain and valid test.

Thus, prior to those practices of the mystic which are to terminate in a luminous vision of the Real, the Real already has that character which such vision alone can confer upon it. At the outset of the mystic's search is a theoretic assumption—illegitimate on the mystic's own grounds—that a new sort of knowledge yet to be won will directly reveal a definite kind of reality. All knowledge other than the one not yet attained, however, is stigmatized by him as invalid, in fact, illusory. The knowledge, then, which directs the mystic's quest, the knowledge that a definite kind of reality will be present to an immediate experience must itself be illusory. And yet it cannot be illusory, without destroying both the object and the direction of the mystic search. Such is the mystic dilemma. Thus, the general theory of Absolute Idealism—formulated and proved by means of the circuitous and "illusory" route

of reflection—is the mystic's necessary presupposition, a presupposition assuming certainty for him only after he has won the rare and difficult experience of which he is in quest. Without this presupposition the whole mystic enterprise is unintelligible, not only to us but to himself. With this presupposition the mystic's "adventure" becomes full of meaning and significance. But the mystic is in the paradoxical situation of the queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, who at the well-known trial-scene commands, "Sentence first—Verdict afterwards."

With the mystic's presupposition of the nature of reality in mind, the details of his attempt to institute an immediate acquaintance with the Absolute become intelligible. The mystic's approach to the Reality is a long pilgrimage of which "union" with the Absolute is the consummation. A process of complex preparation must be initiated—an active and strenuous inward pursuit—before that complete state of *illumination* can be secured in which the soul of the mystic is immediately aware of Absolute Truth. This process of preparation is of an intensely dramatic character and is usually characterized as a *negative way*, because it consists in first detaching oneself from things finite, from the objects of sense and reflection, from the whole world of space and time. "Into this house (of his innermost self)," says Tauler, "must man now go and completely desist from and abandon his sensations, and all sensible things, such as are brought into the soul and perceived by the senses and the imagination. And he must also put away all the ideas and forms, even the conceptions of reason, and all activity of his own reason."¹² The necessity for this "essay in detachment"—to use Hocking's apt phrase—is perfectly consistent with the mystic's "theoretic" assumption. The reality which the mystic seeks having been *defined* as absolutely other than the objects of sense and reason, the road to it must indeed be a road far removed from these cognitive processes. If,

¹² Quoted by Hocking, *ibid.*, p. 373.

as the mystic believes, sense and reflection can report only isolated facts or abstract law, transitory states or traditional concepts; if sense and reflection can never reveal a living whole, a transcendent unity, an immutable spirit, what can the mystic, seeking his Absolute, do but rid himself of these cognitive impediments? "He who believes that 'if God is to come in, the creatures must go out' must make his drastic choice," says Hocking.¹³ It will not do to contemplate a land route if the object of one's desire is located on a "green isle in the sea" or, to vary the metaphor, it is absurd to consult a map of the earth if what one seeks is hidden in the interior of a different planet. The mystic sets out on a definite voyage in pursuit of a definite object. He knows not only what he seeks, but he knows the ways which lead away from and those which lead towards it. The mystic's preparation is, therefore, marked by a characteristic absence from wavering and hesitancy. Definite as the object of his quest, is his procedure in initiating and completing it. The ways which lead away from the Absolute the mystic knows must not be trodden. "The darkness of the cave of sense" and the "wilderness of intellectual theories"¹⁴—both must be shunned. Thus, the *via negativa* or the "purgative stage" in the traditional mystical ascent is not only consistent with, but is an inevitable part of, the mystic "theory" of the Real.

It may be here remarked, in passing, that the *via negativa* is not an exclusively mystic road, but is one which not only idealism but all philosophy has trodden. From Thales on, philosophy has recognized that reality is not what it seems and it does not seem what it is, and that the seeker after truth must first purge himself from the prejudices and errors of sense and common sense ere he can hope to meditate upon the eternal verities. The paral-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹⁴ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, New York, 1913, vol. II, p. 258.

leism between the stages in the mystical ascent and those of philosophic reflection is a subject worthy of a detailed examination, but lack of space forbids more than a mere mention of it. Students of Descartes, to point at one illustration, whose philosophy is indeed far removed from mysticism, will easily distinguish in the "Cartesian Ascent" the 'purgative,' the 'meditative' and the 'illuminative' or the 'intuitive' phases. And to Hegel's vision, to name an absolute idealist, there leads no other path than the negative path. His *Phenomenology of Spirit*—called by Hegel himself his "Voyage of Discovery"—consists of a series of progressive purgations—necessary rungs on the ladder which leads up to his own philosophic vision. Indeed, without intellectual purgation there can be no sound thinking.

Thus the "purgative" process is one of self-detachment from what the mystic knows the real is not. Appearance and reality are concepts unhesitatingly used by him to designate two distinct levels of existence, from the first of which he must completely divest himself if he is ever to reach the latter. To consider farther the details of the "Mystic Way" lies beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to add that upon the removal of the appearances of outer sense and discursive thought there follows the phase of "meditation"—a concentrated, attentive 'gazing' upon "the divine things in which he [the mystic] already believes," a complete abandonment "to the contemplation of them," and the attainment of "a certain inner state of delightful contemplation, while conflict and complexity gives way to peace."¹⁵ This is preliminary to the final, the 'illuminative' or 'unitive' stage—the terminus of the mystic's journey, the result of which is characterized by Hocking thus: "The mystic has been knocking at the door of his world, an outsider, preparing himself inwardly

¹⁵ J. Royce, "George Fox as Mystic," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. VI, January, 1913.

and outwardly . . . What he reports is, that he *has been admitted*; that from being an outsider, knocking at the door of things, he has ceased to be an outsider and a subordinate. He uses the words 'illumination,' 'union,' sometimes 'deification,' to express what has come to him. In some way he is admitted to the council of the maker of this world of things. He has become an understander of the heart of it. And in evidence of his truth he is able to walk about among things and men—do we say an alien?—on the contrary, as one for the first time fully present and at home, able to recognize himself and God in whatever declares itself, able to open himself to the whole of experience. This is what the mystic reports."¹⁶

Upon the psychological nature of the mystic experience it is not relevant here to express any opinion. Professor Hocking has dealt with it lengthily and sympathetically and has tried to bring it "within the range of law." For the rhythm, the disconnection, and the solitude which characterize the mystic experience, he finds numerous analogies in normal mental life. From the epistemological point of view, the experience—whatever its psychology—can mean nothing more than a peculiar and personal verification on the mystic's part of his preconceived "theory" or "hypothesis" of the Real. He reports that he has at last found what he has set out to find. We must here not be deterred by the mystic's "negative" narrative of his pilgrimage. His account of the Absolute as "an undifferentiated One," "the Silent desert of the Godhead where no one is at home," "an abysmal Dark," "a nameless Nothing," is a mere rhetorical device. These expressions *connote* a Being whose perfection, whose glory, whose finality, no particular name can denote. "The Absolute is the very opposite of a mere nothing," says Royce, "for it is fulfillment, attainment, peace, the goal of life, the object of desire, the end of knowledge . . . The light above the light is, to our deluded

¹⁶ *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, pp. 387, 388.

vision, darkness. It is our finite realm that is falsity, the mere nothing. The Absolute is All Truth."¹⁷

But the mystic postulates from the very beginning of his quest and in advance of that ineffable insight which alone constitutes the mystic test of truth, the identity of all Truth with the Absolute, of all Reality with the Perfect One, of all That Is with a Divine Being. To the discovery and attainment of such an assumed identity, the mystic's life of worship is devoted. Thus, it is a definite "thesis" of the nature of reality with which the mystic must begin, and as the "proof" of such thesis he offers his unique and indescribable experience. But until this peculiar proof, the "mystic union," is actually achieved, the mystic cannot escape the charge of entertaining an unverified hypothesis of the Real, an hypothesis, moreover, because it is not yet verified by the only form of cognition having validity, must be looked upon as being on a par with all that which he stigmatizes as "illusory." Without this particular hypothesis, however, both as his starting point and his goal, the mystic life and its practices are robbed of all meaning and significance.

A certain type of idealism, then, the type embodied in the doctrine that Reality is Absolute, One, Whole, and Spirit, accessible to the spiritual nature of man, is implied in the mystic's endeavor—nay, in a sort of axiomatic fashion is deliberately assumed in the mystic's practical and meaningful life of worship. But this idealistic doctrine, if it has any truth, has the truth which the labor of reflection alone can sustain. It is a doctrine which means to be an interpretation of the universe in its entirety and complexity, and as such presupposes a complete and systematic and critical examination of the problems of life and of the world. Its method is reflective and argumentative, i.e., it consists in convincing rationally that the idealistic interpretation can most successfully cope with the universal

¹⁷ *The World and the Individual*, vol. I, p. 171.

problems of life. If it can succeed in exhibiting that it alone is a complete and coherent and self-consistent interpretation of the universe, then and only then may idealism lay claim to validity. The view of reality assumed by mysticism is a *result of articulate and elaborate reflection*, and is not merely a point of departure.

Absolute Idealism, with the general thesis of which mysticism begins, permits of a variety of formulation and interpretation. To the general abstract notion that Reality is Absolute and One and Whole and spiritual, knowable to a spiritual insight, all absolute idealists may be said to subscribe, but they will not agree upon the kind of absoluteness, unity, wholeness, and spirituality that may belong to reality, and upon the ways of knowing such reality. Mysticism, however, begins and ends with an abstract and vague unity, wholeness, and spirituality of its Absolute. We glean from the mystic, either before or after his "illumination," nothing beyond the bare fact that the Absolute somehow *is One, is All, is Perfection*. In what does the absoluteness of reality consist? *How* is the unity of the world to be interpreted? *What* is the nature of its wholeness? *What* constitutes its spirituality? *How* must one conceive of its infinity and perfection? *Why*, if reality is absolute, one, and whole, and spirit, does it present contradictory and discrepant features? With these, and with countless other questions, philosophic idealism seeks to grapple. For the mystic who either still seeks or who has already found absolute reality, these questions do not exist, because he does not ask them, and in ignoring these questions the mystic is, from his point of view, again quite consistent. When one is yearning to be united with a lovable and living reality, when one hopes and somehow knows that in such a union all will be well, when the fading away of the "doubter and the doubt" constitutes the solution of all problems, it is ill to prolong the agony of thinking, escape from which is the mystic's supreme attempt. "He wishes to be, rather than to think," is

Hocking's characterization of the typical mystic's attitude. But the intellectual and spiritual travail of the ages, the united and sustained philosophic effort of the centuries, may be required to disclose the wealth and the depth and the complexity of the questions which mysticism ignores and which its "theory" of the real assumed in its practice persistently invites.

If the view of mysticism here developed be at all correct, the objects of the mystic quest must be held to be identical with that form of reality which is the reflective outcome of many types of absolute idealism. Only, in the latter the outcome is not assumed, as it is in mysticism, at the beginning, but is the result of a rational attempt to interpret the world in its totality and complexity. The proof of such interpretation does not depend upon a knowledge wholly unique, exclusive, and ineffable, but upon a knowledge which is both articulate and demonstrable. The mystics, together with other anti-intellectualists, appear to identify reason or reflection with the power of forming abstract ideas or with the process of framing definitions, making divisions, classifications, and generalizations. Reason for them is essentially artificial and analytical, working piecemeal, obtaining but bits and fragments. "To understand life by concepts," says William James, "is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits, as if with scissors, and immobilizing these in our logical herbarium [where they are kept] as dried specimens."¹⁸ Evelyn Underhill, voicing the mystic protest against intellectualism, rejects an intellectualistic Absolute as "a meaningless diagram, a superfluous complication of thought. Every effort made by philosophy to go forth in search of it is merely the metaphysical squirrel running round the conceptual cage."¹⁹ But the function of analysis is only one aspect of the complex life of thought. Thought appears in its most significant work as synthetic, constructive, inventive. In its synthetic

¹⁸ *Pluralistic Universe*, New York, 1909, p. 244.

¹⁹ *Mysticism*, p. 16.

capacity, thought has to do, not with parts but with wholes, not with dividing but with unifying, not with definition but with insight. Ever since Plato, the distinction between thought as analytical and thought as synthetic has been emphasized, and in Kant, but more particularly in his followers, the term "understanding" is employed for the former, while the latter alone is the principal function of "reason." This technical matter can not be here pursued further. It is pertinent only to call attention to a different view of the nature of reason, which, if true, would remove in a large measure the mystic's objection to philosophic idealism. For reason, too, can have 'visions,' 'insights,' 'intuitions.' And one may add that to this function of reason is due all constructive work of science. Science is not a matter merely of analysis, classification, and abstraction. It is to the intuitive or imaginative mind of the scientist that we owe the invention of successful hypotheses and the discovery of scientific laws. Science and philosophy alike depend upon synthetic insights and intuitive visions. "Reason," as Royce says, "means simply broader intuition, the sort of seeing that grasps many views in one, that surveys life as it were from above, that sees, as the wanderer views the larger landscape from a mountain-top."²⁰

A "vision" of reality is thus not the exclusive prerogative of the mystic. Vision of an intellectual sort is a philosophic attitude *par excellence*. If philosophy is taken to mean a science or an art of interpretation and appreciation, and not merely one of description and classification, can it be aught else than an expression of vision? In the matter of vision, metaphysics allies itself with poetry or with art in general, rather than with the positive or natural sciences. To both the poet and the metaphysician reality throws out but dim suggestions which they have a right to interpret. The meaning of interpretation is nothing else than the ability to see far beyond or behind these

²⁰ *The Sources of Religious Insight*, New York, 1912, p. 86.

suggestions. True, the poet and the metaphysician employ different methods in interpreting the suggestions which reality hints to them. But the right and the will to interpret is grounded in both cases on a vision. Whence, then, the deeper reality or meaning of things? Whence the search or quest for a deeper reality or meaning? This very search is grounded upon a particular vision or inner experience—neither mystical nor mysterious—which must come to every philosopher. This vision is the first and primary condition of every philosophy. This simply means that the philosopher or poet “sees” things in a way different from common sense. On account of such a vision, Thales, I fancy, is entitled to be called the Father of Philosophy; he asked questions about the universe which nobody before him thought of asking. He had a vision that the world was not what it appeared to him. It is in such a general sense that we may also speak of ‘metaphysical imagination,’ but there is nothing exclusive about it, and in this sense it is indeed true that any or anybody’s philosophy is due to a vision. Which and whose vision is the right or the true vision is, of course, a different question, to be decided on different grounds.

This interpretation of a philosophic vision not in opposition to reason, but being the very life of reason, would apply to mysticism as well. The *whole-idea* with which the mystic begins his quest, without which, as has been shown, the entire mystic enterprise would be meaningless, the *initiation*, rather than the completion, of the “Mystic Way,” constitutes his really *philosophic* vision. Vague and abstract, to be sure, is this vision, but it is perfectly determinate. For the mystic, it will be remembered, does not set out to seek for an indefinite somewhat. His object is clearly defined: a Reality, One and Absolute and Spiritual, discoverable by a spiritual seeker. He in a measure already possesses that which he seeks. His quest is a quest for verification of a definite hypothesis. It is the intellectual hypothesis—the *non-mystical* starting point of the

1) Comp
2) Phil
3) Ont
4) Au
5) P

Chubb

mystic—and not its ineffable esoteric and purely personal verification which is a vision possessing genuine philosophic significance.

And because the mystic has this *whole-idea*, because he begins with this *intellectual* vision for which he seeks non-intellectual confirmation, because his starting point is an idealistic hypothesis, mysticism will always demand philosophic attention. Mysticism cannot articulate what it finds, but what it seeks is a verification of a determinate hypothesis which it has in common with philosophic idealism. Both the idealist and the mystic share in the same implicit doctrine, but while the mystic vanishes from a definite relatively exoteric hypothesis into an ineffable esoteric immediacy, the idealist progresses to a mediate explicit interpretation of the universe. The difference between them may well be illustrated by the story of a French professor who, at the opening of a course in metaphysics, summed up his whole philosophic doctrine by means of three gestures. He said “L’Idealisme,” raising his hand towards heaven, “Le Materialisme,” pointing his finger downward, and “Le Spiritualisme,” pressing his hand to his heart. “These gestures,” he continued, “contain my whole metaphysical system, but it will require more than one year to develop their profound meaning, to understand the wealth of their implications, and to justify the theory of the universe they express.” In relation to philosophic idealism, we may conclude, mysticism remains but an inarticulate hint, a subtle shrug, a silent gesture, whose full and deep meaning and whose vast and rich significance the intellectual travail of generations of men cannot completely exhaust.



TF

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